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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the World Muslim Congress, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category I), and by Pax Christi International, the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Association for the Defence of Religious Liberty, the World Movement of Mothers, the International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[16 February 1994]

Religious intolerance

1. In the conclusions contained in his report (E/CN.4/1994/79), Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur on the question of religious intolerance, expresses his concern that religious intolerance may facilitate the emergence of situations that threaten or in some way undermine international peace and security and jeopardize the right of man and of peoples to peace. The Special Rapporteur rightly observes that all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief spring from the human mind and that it is there, rather than anywhere else, that action should focus as a matter of priority. The special rapporteurs and working groups responsible for thematic issues are therefore in our view concerned. The

Special Rapporteur also rightly considers that education could be the essential means of combating discrimination and intolerance. We cannot overemphasize the responsibility of the public authorities for action in their legitimate sphere of competence.

2. The world's major religions and spiritual movements for their part carry the enormous responsibility of opposing violence, war, poverty and social exclusion and fostering respect for the dignity of each individual, who is unique among his peers. The three monotheistic religions have throughout history served as a pretext for too many violent conflicts and wars. Their representatives must now intensify efforts to identify within the very core of religious ideology the accretions and interpretations attributable to past circumstances, conflicts and wars. Their testimony would thus become a force and firm foundation for greater justice, truth and peace. It has to be recognized that the teaching of religion to children of all faiths still frequently contains elements that are responsible for inhibiting their emotional and intellectual development and are potential sources of incomprehension, social injustice, conflict, violence and war.

3. In August 1993, several non-governmental organizations submitted a statement (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/NGO/17) to the Sub-Commission informing it of their decision to set up an open-ended and informal study group made up of specialists in contemporary sciences, well-known persons representing the major religions and human rights experts. In his statement on item 20 during the current session, the representative of Pax Christi International reiterated their request to the Commission:

(a) To invite the rapporteurs concerned to draw due attention, in respect of each country or each theme considered by them, to the connections between the violations noted and local customs, including those with a religious connotation, if the latter run counter to international human rights standards. The working group referred to above could put forward, through the relevant NGOs, practical and useful suggestions to the rapporteurs responsible for ensuring that States implement the conventions they have ratified and the declarations to which they have subscribed.

(b) To request the Secretary-General to submit a report summarizing the observations made by the rapporteurs concerned regarding religious and/or cultural impediments of the implementation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the standards deriving from it or supplementing it.

4. We are firmly convinced that cooperation with NGOs, in particular those that feel especially concerned by the elimination of any form of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, constitutes an indispensable contribution to the implementation of the ideals of justice and peace which are the raison d'être of the United Nations.